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## NOTES AND QUERIES.

NOTE ON THE GROUND-HOG MYTH AND ITS ORIGIN. — To the folk-lorist there are few pleasures which excel that of the discovery of a familiar superstition parading in ancient garb. Such was the writer's fortune, upon reading a discussion which took place before the Société Préhistorique Française in January of 1917.<sup>1</sup> There M. Catelan records, —

“On running through the numerous calendars that were given me for the *Capo d'Anno*, we noted that our *Studio* calendar bore for the 1st of February the fête of the Holy Bear (Saint Ours).

“Now, there is an alpine Provençal proverb which says, ‘Si, pour le Chandeleur, l'Ours sorte de sa tannière et voit son ombre, il rentre et de quarante jours ne sorte plus.’

“We have thought to interest our colleagues by calling attention to this date of the 1st of February and that of the 2d of February (le Chandeleur), both of which treat of the bear, and at the same time are brought into relation with the sun. In any case, we have brought a stone, perhaps useful, to the temple which is being rebuilt.”

When and how this Provençal bear<sup>2</sup> migrated to the New World may never be known; but there would seem to be no possible doubt of its identity with the American ground-hog, which, on the 2d of February, annually casts its shadow across the pages of our daily press.

In the discussion, M. Marcel Baudouin adds to the above, —

“Le Chandeleur is an ancient festival, *en rapport* with the Pleiades-Sun (and not the winter solstice). It corresponded, some thirty-five hundred years ago, to the vernal equinox. The retrogression of a month and a half is due solely to the precession of the equinoxes (one month for two thousand years). The bear is here the polar constellation, that at one time, associated with the Pleiades, governed the seasons.”

While not accepting all of M. Baudouin's conclusions, the present writer deems it worth while to call the attention of American students to certain associations of ideas and coincidences of date. The rite of blessing the candles for the year upon the second day of February, which is responsible for the naming of Candlemas, did not come into general usage until the eleventh century; but there is little doubt that here, as in other *sun-light* ceremonies, the Church but gave a tardy recognition to folk-thought, which proved too deeply rooted for eradication. The day has long been consecrated to the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, and the history of this holy day leads through the dusty mazes of early church tradition to yet more ancient folk-rites. The date of the festival depended

<sup>1</sup> MM. L. Catelan et Marcel Baudouin, *Discussion sur les Cupules, Saint-Ours, et le Soleil* (*Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, 14 : p. 55).

<sup>2</sup> If the sun shines the 2d of February (Candlemas), there will be freezing weather for six weeks (or forty days; in Thuringia and Westphalia, four weeks); the badger (in Bohemia, the bear) must stay that long under ground or in his lair (Silesia, Schwerin, Thuringia, Westphalia, Oldenburg, Tyrols). —A. WUTTKE, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart* (3d ed., 1900), p. 82.

nominally upon that of the Epiphany, being fixed at forty days after that date. It would lead too far afield to enter into the complicated question of the Epiphany festival dates: suffice it to state that, prior to the adoption by the Church of Dec. 25, the ancient British "Mother's night," as the date of the Nativity, — a change which was made in the century between A.D. 350 and 440 — both Epiphanies fell upon Jan. 6, and the Purification upon Feb. 14, a date upon which it is still celebrated by the Armenian church.

Prior to the institution of this latter festival, in the second half of the fourth century, this date of Feb. 14-15 had been one of great significance in the Pagan world, being no less than the ancient festival of the *Lupercalia*. Presided over by the Luperci, or Wolf-Priests, entailing bloody sacrifices of goats and dogs, with traces of human sacrifice, it is conceded to be pre-Roman in origin. A most significant priestly procession, which encircled the walls of the old Palatine city, its course marked by stones, was accompanied by the striking of the crowding populace, the blows of the thong being courted as conferring fertility. The ceremony bears all the marks of a spring-sun festival. Avowedly its object was, by expiation and purification, to secure the fruitfulness of the land, increase of flocks, and the prosperity of the whole people. From this purification the month of February takes its name.

It is not surprising that in Rome these ancient rites were linked with the Wolf priesthood, representative of the traditional lupine clan association — totemic or otherwise. That elsewhere other guardian beasts may have stood in the same relation, seems probable, in view of such fragments as have survived the centuries, as the bear myth still known to Provençal folk-lore, to which M. Catelan alludes.

The Holy Bear of Feb. 1 — the disappointed bear that continues, after thirty-five hundred years, to look for the returning vernal sun, and, seeing only his pale shadow, goes sadly back to his den to sleep for forty days — points to the crystallization of this folk-saying at a time when the precession of the equinoxes had shifted to about the 14th of March, the astronomical phenomenon traditionally belonging to the 2d of February; i.e., about five hundred years ago.

The arbitrary change of date for the Christian festival of the Purification of the Virgin, while separating it from the Pagan purification rites still practised at the time of its institution, apparently brought it into relation with a yet older spring festival, which still retained in places the traces of fire rites and animal associates.

To return to the American ground-hog, when, on Feb. 2, he comes forth and sees his shadow, be thankful that the myth is not of more recent origin, since then we might be threatened with some seven more weeks of winter.

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